

**4th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MANAGEMENT
(4th ICM 2014) PROCEEDING**

16 - 17 JUNE 2014. THE KUTA BEACH HERITAGE HOTEL, BALI INDONESIA
ISBN: 978-967-5705-14-4. WEBSITE: www.internationalconference.com.my

ENGAGINGMALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES' ACADEMICS

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia perceives the value of education in the pursuit of knowledge and a positive application of it for an enrichment of the nation. Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs) currently more than ever, must ensure that the proper individuals to serve in suitable positions in order to reach all of the Ministry of Education's vision, mission and objectives. In general, this study concentrates on the individual level at HEIs, who can cause an adjustment in organisational performance, either through their instant contribution or in the longer term by representing the highest levels of their potential. The objective of this study is to identify the employee engagement related to demographic factors such as gender, age, ethnicity and working experience. The years of career achievement, expectant of retirement and intention to leave the organisations were also identified. This study was conducted among academics of Malaysian public universities that represents higher education sector. The total returned and usable questionnaire was 399. The data collection for this study was carried out through self-administered questionnaire and was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The useful guidelines for human resource practices in the present study can be outlined for Malaysian HEIs future studies.

Keywords: Employee engagement, higher education institutions (HEIs), academics, public universities

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical concept of employee engagement combines a positive attitude and behaviour of employees' psychological well-being towards their work performance. Before the word engagement, terms such as job satisfaction and enthusiasm were used to describe a worker's commitment to

work (Marcey and Schneider, 2008). Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002, p. 269) defined the term employee engagement as “involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work”. Employee engagement is part of an emerging emphasis in psychology and organisational behaviour on increasing our understanding of human strengths and optimal functioning as opposed to the traditional focus that is maximizing employee positive states and behaviours (Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn, 2003; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Employee engagement involves giving workforce a sense of participation, freedom and trust. The emotion, the cognitive and the physical level of engagement through vigour, dedication and absorption among HEIs employees are very important to be in existence within the organisation. As HEIs are the backbone of human capital development, it is important to engage employees in the organisations for their vision and mission. Moreover, HEIs are unique organisations that tend to focus on services to students or the community. Even though HEIs have different purpose of the business institutions that put profit as the main priority, nonetheless they still need the human capital to engage with the organisations for the sustainable and better future.

The objective of this study is to identify the level of engagement among Malaysian HEIs' academics between several demographic factors, such as gender, age, ethnicity and years of working experience. This study is also report the descriptive results on years of career achievement, expectant of retirement and intention to leave the organisations among those academics.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs)

HEIs in Malaysia refer to institutions of higher education. HEIs include community colleges, polytechnics, and colleges, public and private universities that are administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE). HEIs in general issue certificates, diplomas, or academic degrees to students who qualify (MOHE, 2011a). The development of the higher education sector in Malaysia is due to the exertions of the Malaysian government to extend the education industry internationally. The increasing figures have influenced other countries to analyse how Malaysia has managed to turn into a regional education hub in Asia. Having gained international recognition as a favourite destination for tertiary and higher education, Malaysia is currently ranked eleventh internationally by UNESCO as a popular study destination; which is reflected by the large number of international students at both public and private HEIs (MOHE, 2011b).

The scope of this research is mainly focused on the universities. Currently, there are twenty public universities and twenty three private universities are registered under the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Malaysia (MOHE, 2011a). According to Jabatan Pengajian Tinggi (2011), public universities in Malaysia are characterised into Research Universities (RU), Comprehensive Universities (CU) and Focus Universities (FU). The character of the RU directly refers to their resources in the development of research and teaching activities. The CU offer diverse types of education curriculums and courses at first degree, master or PhD programmes. While the focus universities are the universities that specialize in specific areas. For instance, technical focus, education focus, management focus and defence focus.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In order to identify the engagement among HEIs' employees, this research focuses on the approach of employee engagement that has been proposed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). According to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct opposite of the three-burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.

Employee engagement differs from motivation and job involvement. It is something that is felt at three levels: the emotion, the cognitive and the physical. If an employee feels engaged on all of these levels, they feel that they have meaningful relationships with peers and co-workers, they are aware of their specific role and they are more likely to produce good work and stay with the company (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonz lez-Roma' 2002). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) operationalised this new concept of work engagement by using three scales: vigour, dedication, and absorption.

1. Vigour is characterized by the level of mental energy and a high resistance when workers perform tasks. It is also characterized by the willingness and ability to invest effort in the work of a person.
2. Dedication is characterized by an important sense, passion, inspiration, pride, and challenge.
3. Absorption is characterized by full concentration and happiness of employees while on duty, in which employees feel the time passes quickly.

METHODOLOGY

The data collection for this study was carried out through self-administered questionnaires. The data collected was processed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software version 19.0. This study intentionally focuses on academic staffs or "academics". A total of 399 academics including professors, associate professors, lecturers, tutors and academic researchers were responded to the survey. The survey applied proportionate random sampling when the proportion of RU: CU: FU was chosen among all public universities' academics.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of the demographic factor based on gender drew quite close number between the genders. There were 183 male respondents (45.9%) and 216 females respondents (54.1%) that show balanced distribution between genders answering the survey.

From the responses, most academics took at least five years to be in their current career position (41.4%). Most of them were lecturers who successfully graduated with a doctoral degree. At average, some of them needed 5 – 10 years (35.3%) and 11 – 20 years (32.8%). Only eight respondents chose more than 21 years career achievement.

A plan for retirement is very important in managing human capital in organisations. This study indicates that 255 respondents will retire after 15 more years of service. There were 23 respondents who will retire soon (within 5 years) while the other 121 respondents planned to retire within 6 – 15 years.

This study also asked the respondents concerning their loyalty towards their current organisations. They were asked whether they want to stay, move out or thinking of moving out from the organisations. Surprisingly, most of the respondents (47.9%) answered "maybe" which means they are thinking about moving out even not it is not yet confirmed. Only 6.8% of the respondents confidently answered "yes" to change their employment in the future. The small number could not challenge the majority of 181 respondents (45.4%) who confirmed that they would not leave the organisations.

Table 1: Summary of Working Profile (N=399)

	Respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Career Achievement for Current Position		
Below 5 years	165	41.4
5 - 10 years	141	35.3
11 - 20 years	85	21.3
21 - 30 years	7	1.8
More than 31 years	1	0.3
Retirement Plan		
In the next 0 - 5 years	23	5.8
In the next 6 -10 years	41	10.3
In the next 11 - 15 years	80	20.1
In more than 15 years	255	63.9
Planning of Changing Employment/ Workplace		
Yes	27	6.8
No	181	45.4
Maybe	191	47.9

The survey items of the study were adopted from UWES by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) to identify the level of engagement among academics based on their demographic factors. The respondents were asked to read each statement carefully and indicate to what extent they feel engaged with their current organisation. The 5 Likert scale; never, rarely, sometimes, often and always were used to measure the items of engagement. The questions that were asked are:

1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.
2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.
3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
4. I can continue working for very long periods at a time.
5. At my job, I am very mentally resilient.
6. In my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well.
7. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.
8. I am enthusiastic about my job.
9. My job inspires me.
10. I am proud of the work that I do.
11. To me, my job is challenging.
12. Time flies when I'm working.
13. When I am working, I forget everything else around me.
14. I feel happy when I am working intensely.
15. I am immersed in my work.
16. I get carried away when I'm working.
17. It is difficult to detach myself from my job.

Table 3 explains the details of the results on the engagement based on four criteria: gender, age, ethnicity and work experience. According to the results, none of the respondents choose to answer

“never” to any items 1 – 17 of the scale. In order to represents the whole items, the researchers calculated mean to identify the level of engagement towards these factors.

The results indicate that the female and male academics does not have significant different for engagement at 0.659 when $F=2.337$, $df=397$. When refers to the total number, it indicates that 183 of male and 216 of female does not show more than 10 percent of difference. Most of the academics were identified to choose “often” engage to organisations. This results indicate a good sign for HEIs that they were having commit and loyal current human capital.

There is also not much difference occurs to other factors such as age, ethnicity and work experience regarding the choices of “often” engage. There are five levels of age that grouped in this study ranging from >20 years until >60 years. Basically, academics at the age of 30-39 years old were very enthusiast with their job. The 39.59% of total respondents which falls into this category indicates that academics at the age of 30 to 39 were highly engage with HEIs. Most of them were newly PhD holders and still eager to work in the organisation. Then, it follows with those who were at the age of 20 to 29 who were still young in the organisations. The level of engagement is seen lower at the age of 40 and above.

Most of the respondents of this study were Malays and this resulted that most of them will be the main contributors in engagement. Regarding the total working experience, most of engaged employees were among those who works for 5 to 10 years’ experience, then followed by those with 11 to 20 years’ experience. It is not surprising when those who were more than 20 years’ experience ignored about engagement as they were already served the organisations for such a long time. The less number of engagement among academics with experience less than 5 years shows that they were still new in the organisations. They might be searching for a new environment or they might still in the process of preparing to get use in the current organisations to engage well.

Table 2: Independent Samples Test for Academics Engagement on Gender

		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Levene Test $F= 2.337$, $Sig.=.127$		t	df	Sig.2-tailed	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	Lower	Upper	
EngageAcademics	Equal variances assumed	-.442	397	.659	-.02193	.04965	-.11954	.07567	
	Equal variances not assumed	-.439	375.305	.661	-.02193	.04996	-.12017	.07630	

Table 3: Cross Tabulation of Academics’ Engagement

Demographic Factors		Engagement among Academics					Total
		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always		
Gender	Male	1	56	122	4		183
	Female	1	59	154	2		216
Age	20 - 29 years	1	16	89	0		106
	30 - 39 years	1	44	113	0		158

	40 - 49 years	0	42	55	4	101
	50 - 59 years	0	13	16	1	30
	60 - 69 years	0	0	3	1	4
Ethnicity	Malay	1	72	168	2	243
	Indian	1	20	38	3	62
	Chinese	0	16	58	1	75
	Other	0	7	12	0	19
WorkExperience	Below 5 years	1	30	79	0	110
	5 - 10 years	1	41	102	0	144
	11 - 20 years	0	37	86	5	128
	21 - 30 years	0	7	9	1	17

CONCLUSION

According to Saks (2006), the more engaged the employees; the more confident they are with their employers and the most likely for them to report positively about their organisations. An organisation should not only invest in human capital when they expect a return on investment. The most engaged workers are often defined as employees who have emotional and intellectual commitment to the organisation (Baumruk 2004; Richman 2006; Shaw 2005) or the amount of success exhibited by the employees in their work (Frank, Finnegan and Taylor, 2004). It is also found that employee engagement in their job can be a basis to make prediction of the employees' intention to quit or stay (Saks, 2006).

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